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# NAVAL POLICY AND THE NAVAL TREATY

BY REAR-ADMIRAL W. V. PRATT, U. S. N.

PREVIOUS to the present agreement to limit their naval armaments, now entered into by five Great Powers, the only existing case of contractual reduction of armaments was that of the Disarmament Agreement of May, 1902, between the republics of Argentina and Chile. Friction between these two countries, more or less actively expressed, had existed since 1897. The agreement entered into by them through the good offices of Great Britain was effective in reducing the tension existing at the time the treaty was made. Though the treaty was not renewed, amicable relations have since existed. Articles I and II of the treaty provided that the two Governments should not take possession of the warships which they were having built or make any other acquisitions, and should reduce their respective fleets according to a reasonable proportion between them. The two Governments also promised not to increase their maritime armaments during five years, without eighteen months' notice in advance; this agreement not including any armaments for the purpose of protecting the shore and ports, but each party being at liberty to acquire vessels for that purpose.

It is thus seen that the great experiment now attempted has historical precedent. To be thoroughly successful the purpose of our present agreements must be transmitted to future generations, otherwise that purpose is lost, and a sacrifice may have been made in vain.

The Naval Treaty, signed by the five Great Powers gathered in Washington to consider Far Eastern problems and a limitation of armament, has a very direct bearing upon the naval policy which this country should, in the future, pursue. The outstanding policies of the United States, to wit: That of "no entangling alliances", the Monroe Doctrine, and the Open Door, particularly the last, must in the future, and so long as the Naval Treaty runs,

be greatly influenced by agreements just entered into. The material backbone of these agreements is the Treaty on the Limitation of Naval Armaments. It is the foundation upon which all of our international policies, now permeated by that atmosphere of better understanding arrived at through the results of this Conference, must be based.

In a great measure results have been accomplished by agreeing to scrap almost entirely the great building programme laid down in 1916 at a time when the fate of Europe hung in the balance, and the United States felt that she must be in a position to safeguard her interests in case Germany should prevail over the Allies. The day of that need having passed, the United States willingly gave up its great naval programme and asked the other nations to meet her in the same spirit. In point of fact, we made the greatest sacrifices. It was just and fair that we should. It was the United States that called the Conference, and her contribution could in no wise be less than that of the other nations sitting with her. Actually the United States scrapped some thirteen new ships with the money spent upon them, in addition to many older ships already built. Let us review the conditions of the treaty.

The United States has, under the terms of the treaty, retained eighteen capital ships, her cruisers and submarines, and the right to build five aircraft carriers. Two of the aircraft carriers may be converted from the capital ships which otherwise would be thrown away. The auxiliary ships necessary to support the fighting fleet in an efficient condition also have been retained under the terms of the Naval Treaty.

It was due to no fault of the United States that the terms of its original proposal were not established carrying a reduction through all types of combatant craft. So long as the discussion focussed upon the solution of Pacific and Far Eastern questions, it was not difficult to arrive at solutions which made the 5-5-3 ratio possible. It was only when the problems strayed from the Pacific to Continental Europe that complications arose, making it difficult to arrive at answers which would satisfy both the purpose of the proposal and the national needs of Powers whose interests seemed to demand solutions other than those suggested by the proposal. For these reasons the contemplated reductions in the

cruiser, destroyer and submarine types were not accomplished, and the 5-5-3 ratio does not apply to these types of ships. However, the main object, which was to effect a reduction in the capital ship tonnage and to establish ratios commensurate with national naval interests, has been accomplished. Likewise the second object, the establishment of aircraft carrier tonnage, ships inferior only in size to the capital ship, was also accomplished on a 5-5-3 basis and in a ratio commensurate with the capital ship tonnage.

The abolishment of competitive building in capital ships and aircraft carriers and the establishment of a naval holiday for ten years, during which period no capital ship tonnage may be laid down, have in themselves accomplished the major purposes of the Naval Limitation Treaty, for these ships, taking three or four years to complete, are the best measures of a nation's floating naval strength.

Under the terms of the treaty the United States, of its capital ships intended to be scrapped under the original proposal, may complete two. The completion of these two ships is essential to bring our Navy to the ratios fixed. Likewise two battle cruisers may be converted to aircraft carriers, and this is important to round out our fleet to its proper proportions so that the essential tasks of training, without which no Navy can be called fit or efficient, may be undertaken. The United States is also permitted to carry to completion the ten scout cruisers now on the ways and building and this should be done, as we are in this type of ship quite behind the actual navy of Great Britain and also behind the proposed navy of Japan.

We are also permitted to complete the submarines now under construction which are of an improved type, capable of performing their tasks with the fleet in a manner which previously has not been possible. These submarines are on the average over 90 per cent on their way towards completion. They serve to replace many of the older craft which age has made obsolete.

In addition to these combatant craft, the United States is permitted to build such small craft, such as gunboats and river police boats, as may be necessary to protect the interests and lives of our nationals abroad.

Article XIX of the Naval Treaty puts a stop, within certain defined limits, to further expansion and fortification of naval bases in the Pacific. The principal point to be noted is, that the establishment of the *status quo* in fortifications and naval bases is an attempt to maintain the spirit of good understanding arrived at through an amicable settlement of the Far Eastern problems, and through the elimination of competitive building and of any aggressive tendencies which might be attributed to us by other Powers. The outlying fortified points of both Japan and the United States have been rendered offensively harmless. The right further to fortify is no longer possible, nor in the future may the great fleets of the United States seek the shelter of fortified harbors within the Philippines, assured that they are so impregnable that they will remain safe havens of refuge and of supply when our fleet, bent on other missions, is absent from their protection. For the defenses of these advanced positions we must rely now upon the spirit of good understanding entered into through the offices of this Conference. Japan has done the same with her outlying positions. The active defense of our Philippine possessions, if such ever becomes a necessity, must now rest entirely upon the back of our floating naval establishment, geographically placed many thousands of miles away.

The Far Eastern agreements arrived at have a very distinct relation to the Naval Limitation Treaty.<sup>1</sup> Any further reduction of our Navy below that of the standard set, by whatever means it may be accomplished, would be in effect to stultify the purposes which the Conference strove to achieve. Important as is the Naval Limitation Treaty in removing friction, yet if it is to live as a vital and not as a spent effort, it must rest on the foundation of the Four Power Treaty. The severing of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the new relationships established have made limitation of naval armament possible. The Four Power Treaty might stand alone; but the spirit, motives and results of the Naval Treaty could not carry on in the coming years of the future without the support of the Four Power Treaty. As the Naval Treaty is the material, so the Four Power Treaty is the moral

<sup>1</sup>They will be effective just in proportion as our naval force, augmented by the recent good understandings reached, is effective.

backbone of the agreements which have been reached by the Conference.<sup>2</sup>

Without going into too great detail, it is sufficient to say that Great Britain under the terms of the treaty may build two 35,000-ton capital ships. When completed, these ships will be the last word in modern naval architecture. She may also lay down two aircraft carriers of 33,000 tons each to match the two which we are permitted to convert from two of our battle cruisers. Other than this, Great Britain has for the present no extensive naval building programme, nor is any necessary, at this moment, to preserve equality in strength with the United States. In light cruisers, flotilla leaders and in modern cruisers generally, Great Britain ranks ahead of the United States, and it may be a long time before we are in a position of equality with Great Britain in cruiser types.

Japan has no capital ships to complete to give her the tonnage allotted, but she has the right to convert two of the ships, which otherwise would be scrapped, into aircraft carriers of 33,000 tons each. In addition to these two ships, Japan has a contemplated programme of light cruisers, destroyers, and submarines, which is quite extensive.

France and Italy have no great programmes in capital ships, but it is their avowed purpose to bring their navies up to date by replacing, under the terms of the treaty, the older capital ships as soon as may be practicable. Each has also submarine, destroyer, and light cruiser programmes sufficient to care for their national needs.

These facts, while not indicating any aggressive tendencies on the part of the nations involved, denote a desire to make efficient those navies which are apportioned to them under the agreements entered into in the Treaty for the Limitation of Naval Armaments.

Naval policy is the system of principles and the general terms of their application governing the development, organization, maintenance, and operation of the Navy. It is based on, and is

<sup>2</sup>International law is the sea law which in war governs the relationships between different sea Powers. It is difficult to make, either by treaty or by imposing the wishes of one nation upon another. It comes into being through universal assent, extending over long years of tradition and sea practice. The Submarine Treaty has a direct bearing on Naval Policy. The more nearly this treaty accords with the rules of existing international law, the more probable it is that in a future war its articles will be generally subscribed to.

designed to support, national policies. It comprehends the questions of numbers, size, type and distribution of vessels and stations, the character and number of personnel, and the character of peace and war operations. It follows the flag the world over. To meet the situation as it to-day exists, a comprehensive naval policy should divide itself under four main heads, namely:

*Education.*—By this is meant not only that essential education which must be carried on at all times within the Service, but instruction outside of the Service proper to enable the public to know the relation of its naval forces to the maritime and international interests of the country and the purposes for and the way in which a naval force should be organized and operated.

*Intercourse with Foreign Powers.*—One of the great results of this Conference has been to inaugurate a better understanding between the parties to the Conference. It is imperative that the good understanding now inaugurated should be perpetuated. It is important that this understanding be extended to those nations which have not participated in the Conference.

*Training.*—Training is the performance of those duties essential to keep a naval force thoroughly indoctrinated and efficient in the operations it might be called upon to perform, both in peace and war. Training makes the boy who passes through the school of the Navy a self-disciplined, efficient man.

*Maintenance.*—The maintenance of the material and personnel factors of a naval organization should be kept in such efficient condition that they readily can be used in case of national need.

The training of the fleet to perform those duties which it might be called upon to undertake in war and must undertake in peace, is the purpose on which the organization of the fleet must be based. In general it may be said that the fleet is organized to perform the four following tasks:

*Scouting.*—To obtain and transmit the information necessary to the efficient conduct of the strategic and tactical features of a campaign.

*Attack.*—The actual operations through which a certain definite objective is obtained.

*Control.*—The retention and administration of objective points which have been won by the attacking force.

*Supply.*—All those other auxiliary activities which enter into and form so large a part of any campaign.

With the fleet thus organized so that training and maintenance become the essential features of internal naval policy, it is practicable to utilize the fleet for the other two purposes indicated, namely, education and intercourse with foreign Powers. Thus, by organizing the naval establishment so that its internal policies are sound, we are able to utilize it for any other purpose which, in time of peace, the country may deem to be necessary.

The organization of the shore and base establishments is in itself a gigantic task. To summarize briefly, it may be said that the purpose and aim of every shore and base establishment must be to make more efficient the fleet which it serves. Without home bases the fleet cannot be repaired, docked, or supplied, and those craft, which during peace must of necessity be laid up, have no place in which to be berthed. The advanced base is to the overseas fleet what the home base is to the fleet operating on its home coasts.

While the active fleet must be dependent upon the shore and base facilities for repair, supply, docking, and a certain amount of maintenance, and can in no wise be thoroughly efficient unless the shore establishments are properly located in a geographical sense and efficiently operated and administered, yet the fleet itself has tasks to perform in order to render it capable of carrying out the nation's policies. It must train to shoot and steam economically, and must consequently engage in those operations without which our naval organization afloat would be only a collection of independent units acting indiscriminately without efficient co-ordination under responsible leaders.

It is not possible to carry on efficient training unless an adequate number of the various component units be gathered together and work side by side as team mates. Under the proposed Treaty there are left to the United States eighteen battleships, or six divisions of three ships each, which must constantly manœuvre and work together in order to form the nucleus of an efficient fighting force.

While the battleships form the main body and the heart of the fighting force, the cruisers, destroyers, submarines, mine forces,



aircraft carriers and aircraft furnish the legs and arms, and adequately to protect and support the main body it is necessary to have an adequate number of these combatant types. And yet this compact body is not in its most efficient condition unless it is in turn aided by its scouts, which must give the fleet the information necessary to carry on intelligently its training problem, or in war strategical or tactical operation. In time of peace the cruiser force is that body from which divisions and units can most quickly be detached and sent on foreign service to perform any duty, including that of showing the flag and of bringing our naval representatives in closer touch with those of other nations. For long and continuous scouting services, it is essential to have an adequate number of long range, sea keeping submarines, which must be additional to the submarines held for defense. For coast and base defense training problems, there are required the appropriate numbers of mine layers, sweepers, aircraft, submarines, and supporting ships. To subsist and maintain our combatant forces afloat there are required the essential fleet adjuncts, such as repair ships, supply ships, fuel ships, mother ships for destroyers and submarines, hospital ships and fleet transports.

To keep this naval establishment ready requires men. No matter how perfect the material may be when laid up, it will not remain efficient unless it be moderately operated and trained in definite tasks, any more than will a merchant marine be smart and efficient unless it be manned by men born and bred to the sea. No better training school for the youth of our country exists today than our Navy.

Although a better understanding has been arrived at, it cannot be the will of this nation to allow its naval establishment to disintegrate to a condition where the 5-5-3 is a name only and not a living fact, and this will be the case if our Navy afloat cannot carry on work similar to that outlined above. The great mission of the Navy is to support the Flag. It may accomplish this either by giving weight to the nation's diplomacy or by force of arms. The thirteen American capital ships scrapped in accordance with the Washington Conference more than justified their brief existence by the weight they gave to American diplomacy. It is difficult to see what would have induced Great Britain and Japan to

accept the invitation to this Conference had it not been for the leading position America had taken as a naval Power; and it can almost be asserted that they would not have accepted the 5-5-3 ratios had it not been for our Naval preponderance. We must not lose sight of the fact that it was the power of our Navy that put the American proposal through. This fact must be accepted; or otherwise we refuse to believe the story which recorded history tells us, or fail to realize that sea power is responsible largely for the spread and maintenance of civilization over the world.

Article XXI of the Treaty for a Limitation of Naval Armament calls for a conference of all the contracting Powers which shall convene as soon as possible after the expiration of eight years from the coming into force of the present Treaty. It is to be hoped that when the contracting Powers meet again in Conference they will find the United States in as strong a position as it was when this Conference met on November 12, 1921. Through its naval establishment alone this will not be a physical possibility, for of its own volition the United States has given up the naval supremacy which it was gaining for the sake of the better understandings that have resulted; but having determined upon a 5-5-3 ratio and upon a policy which stands for a Navy second to none, it is fitting that the United States should come to this Conference with a naval establishment as strong as the ratios agreed upon will allow it to be.

At the close of the Great War, the United States met with her associates in an attempt to find a formula which would solve the questions of future wars, and settle the immediate problems caused by this. The proposal made at Versailles could never free itself from the war clouds which surrounded it or from the pressure of local national needs and aspirations. At Washington the United States made the first and greatest sacrifice. The response was immediate. Great as was our money sacrifice, it was as nothing to the sacrifice made by this country when she gave up her dream of naval supremacy for the sake of better international relationships.

Sixty years ago the United States turned down another page of sea history, when her great maritime fleet of stately ships was swept off blue waters by the advent of the dingy tramp; when the

men who trod their quarter decks, of a breed than whom maritime history knows none better, turned their eyes from the tall spars and from the ocean they loved to the Great West. Those who love the sea, to whom she speaks as does a mother to her child, who find in her fiercest moods only the manifestation of sublime power—those men know what surrender of sea power means.

Thinking naval men, as a matter of pride, regret the sacrifice made in yielding world naval supremacy, yet from a broader point of view they welcome the results accomplished, if they be carried on into the future. No class of men realize more clearly the relations existing between sea power and national world power, or are more willing to subordinate naval aims to the country's wishes; but until that time arrives when the ideals for which our country stands are world ideals, until international frictions cease, until moral suasion is its own sanction and law is self-enforcing, this country can no more afford to allow its gray guardians of the peace to disintegrate as did its stately clipper ships, than can a great city afford to give up its guardians of the law.

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